

Sunday, April 21, 2024 am

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (12)

Taking Time to Pray

This year we have been addressing the subject of communicating with God. Thus far we have noted God as able and accessible recipient of our prayers. And we have noted several key examples of people who prayed in scripture. Today, we begin to make application by addressing, HOW to pray. In coming lessons we will address our part in prayer – how to pray, what to pray for, who can pray, what characteristics make prayer acceptable and/or hinder prayer, and many suggestions associated with a strong life of prayer.

We begin with a lesson addressing our need to take time to pray.

I. Pray without ceasing

- a. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 – does not mean 24/7 praying. Consider Luke 11:1 - Jesus “ceased praying”. The point is we pray regularly, and it is a part of daily lives. You might also consider the expression as one who is living in such a way that he/she can pray at any time (living a godly life).
- b. Consider our examples: Jesus prayed often (Luke 5:16), David prayed in the mornings (Psalm 5:3), Daniel prayed 3 times a day, even when threatened and it became illegal (Daniel 6:10), Elijah was described as a man of prayer (James 5:17-18), Cornelius prayed to God always (Acts 10:2), In Acts 6:4 we find the apostles appointed qualified men to tend to material needs (serving tables) so that “*we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*”, etc. We have discussed many of these in recent lessons, and we find more than the occasional utterance to God.
- c. **Ephesians 6:18** – part of the armor of God. As we describe the armor of God, we often forget this point. BUT, as anyone who has served in the military knows – you CANNOT dismiss the importance of communication as part of your “uniform”.
- d. **Colossians 4:2** – continue earnestly in prayer.
 - i. The Greek word, προσκαρτερέω (proskartereō), is an expression that means, “to persevere devotedly”. L&N (68.68), “to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty.”;
 - ii. The word is found 10x in the NT. 5 of them are related to prayer:
 1. Romans 12:12 – continuing steadfastly in prayer.
 2. Acts 1:14, as the 120 awaited the day of Pentecost.
 3. Acts 2:42 -And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers),
 4. Acts 6:4 above,
 - iii. In this we see the importance of regular and serious prayer in our lives.
- e. **1 Peter 4:7** – be serious and watchful in your prayers. Peter, likely addressing how we do not know WHEN “the end of all things will be” (“at hand” could indicate “at any time” and thus we should always live AS IF the end were imminent).

II. Parables about persistence in prayer

- a. **Luke 11:1-13**. The disciples of Jesus ask Him to teach them to pray as John taught his disciples (NOTE: Prayer is a spiritual discipline in virtually every system of faith). After presenting a model of things to pray for (Luke 11:1-4), Jesus presented a parable about persistence in prayer – **The parable of the persistent friend**.

- i. A friend arrives to visit at midnight (unannounced?). Wanting to be hospitable, he shamelessly goes to his neighbor and begs for 3 loaves of bread. The neighbor who is settled in along with his family, tells him to go away. Most Palestinian homes had only 1 room, so his entire family was there. Furthermore, the door was likely bolted and to unbolt it would be noisy. To get up was inconvenient. BUT his neighbor persists (continues to knock) UNTIL his friend gets up and gives him what he needs.
- ii. Jesus is implying that if he will do that for bread, consider what God will do for you if you persist to pray to Him (11:9-10). He says, “Ask...seek...knock.”
- iii. Contextually, we must understand that God DOES care about us (cf. 1 Peter 5:7). He does not want us to “go away”, but He DOES want us to be persistent in our requests, so that when that prayer is answered, we will know and appreciate the answer, whatever that answer might be.

b. Luke 18:1-8 – The parable of the unjust judge

- i. Note vs. 1, *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,*
- ii. The parable addresses a corrupt judge who did not fear God and did not regard man (true justice). And there was a widow that had been defrauded. She comes pleading for justice. While he didn’t care about her, because of her persistence, he avenges her. She is there “day in and day out”. When he arrives in the morning, as he goes to lunch and returns, when he goes home. He cannot escape her presence, and she is likely attracting unwanted attention. SO, the judge acts and avenges her.
- iii. Jesus teaches the lesson that if an unrighteous judge will avenge one because of persistence, **how much more** will God avenge those who “cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them.”
- iv. NOTE: Do NOT compare God to this unjust judge. Contrast Him with the judge. This is an “from the lesser to the greater argument”. Understand that God knows what is best – He answers our prayers in His time and according to His will – cf. 1 John 5:14-15. We have already addressed that point.
- v. Vs. 8, *I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?* Just remember that God answers in His time (he took 25 years to answer Abraham’s son, and 430 years to fulfill the promised time giving him the land). BUT, when He does answer, it will be at the exact right time and in the right way. AND when we look back, we will see His wisdom in how and if He avenges us, whether in this life or in the next (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9, Romans 12:19-21, etc.).

III. Taking time to pray

- a. Having established that God wants us to pray often and persistently let us conclude with a few suggestions to help us.
- b. Pray about it! Consider James 1:5-6, Philippians 4:6, etc. We can all agree that this is something God WANTS us to do. ASK for His help in learning to pray more fervently.
- c. Set aside a specific time – A specified time means you have made PLANS to communicate with God. It is recommended that we set aside a regular time daily (or at least several times a week), perhaps 30 minutes, to talk to Him (pray) and to listen to Him (study).
- d. Find a specific place free from distractions. If possible, if you have a regular place where you can take a few QUIET moments by yourself OR with a partner (spouse, etc.), free of as many

distractions as possible, that can be a benefit. Remember how Jesus said, *But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* (Matthew 6:6) Make that a place that is special because it is where you pray (and study). Even if it is used for other purposes (like a dining room table), when you see that place throughout the day, you are reminded that this is where you meet with God just between Him and you.

- e. Work to make it a habit – like all good habits, if you have not done this, it will take time. **The key is to start now.** Incorporate short prayers throughout your day. A prayer to begin the day, before you eat (EVEN if you are in public), when something or someone crosses your mind, and at evening as you lay down to sleep. Someone suggested that you make prayer a 30 day challenge. Meaning, for 30 days you are going to pray at the same time each day. As you do that, it will get you on your way to making it a habit.
- f. Shorter is better than skipping. One source made this great observation. If you do not have time today to follow your regular routine, just a short prayer of a couple of sentences serves as a reminder that prayer is important. Just don't make this a habit if you can help it.
- g. Make your prayers meaningful. There needs to be a purpose behind your prayers. Pray for things that are meaningful to you (a list that will expand as time goes on). There are general things we ought to be praying for regularly, but there are also specific things to pray for (certain people and situations that are meaningful to you). Throughout coming lessons we will address this in much greater detail.
- h. Some have suggested making a prayer journal. This is a PRIVATE book of things you have prayed for (and when), as well as a list of people and things you want to pray for. Some also record when prayers are answered.
- i. Find someone close to you to hold you accountable. Perhaps your spouse, parent, child or close friend. Someone who on a weekly basis will ask you about how you have been praying. This needs to be someone who will not be too harsh, but who loves you and cares about your spiritual well being. Accountability is a great tool in many areas of life.

And thus we can see that prayer needs to be a regular part of our lives. WE have seen this in both scripture and example. I conclude with Ephesians 5:15-17, *See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* Walk wisely and USE your TIME wisely. Time is a commodity that once it is used up, you cannot get it back. God wants us to be wise stewards with our time, and that includes prayer. Do you pray as often as you ought to? Think about it!